

Governor Carney Proclaims Sept. 20-24 as Falls Prevention Awareness Week in Delaware

Falls can be disabling and are the leading cause of traumatic brain injuries in the United States, particularly among older adults and young children, according to the Mayo Clinic. To raise awareness about fall-related injuries, especially among seniors, Governor John Carney and Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long proclaimed September 20-24, 2021, as Falls Prevention Awareness Week in Delaware and encouraged Delawareans to do their part.

One in four U.S. adults over the age of 65 experiences a fall each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports. Falls can have devastating consequences such as bone fractures, brain injury and temporary or permanent disability. Additionally, falls are a leading cause of death in adults over 65, and the leading cause of non-fatal injuries for almost all age groups.

“Focusing on our health has never been more important, said Governor Carney. “Creating a safer environment can reduce the risk of falling for people of all ages, especially the elderly.”

Among older adults, falls can be caused by tripping over one’s own feet or clutter in the house, vision problems, medication,

poor balance or weak leg muscles. The Delaware Coalition for Injury Prevention's (DCIP) Falls Prevention team advises seniors to get regular vision and hearing checkups, eat nutritious foods and beverages, stay hydrated, get regular exercise and discuss their risk for falling with their health care provider.

"By getting regular checkups and staying physically active, older adults and those at risk for balance disorders can prevent falls and the debilitating injuries caused by them," said Lt. Governor Hall-Long.

To help foster a falls-free Delaware, the DCIP's Falls Prevention team asks communities, businesses, schools, organizations, and households to follow this safety advice:

Maintain walkways to ensure a smooth surface that can be navigated easily. Replace crumbling and splintered surfaces. Prevent slippery conditions by removing snow, ice, rain, wet moss, leaves, oil or other substances that can cause individuals to fall.

Ensure that there are curb cuts or other detectable warning surfaces that meet state/local safety codes and the guidelines provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Curb cuts, tactile surface pavers, slopes, contrasting colors and other universal design elements benefit everyone, including persons with disabilities who use walkers and wheelchairs, those pushing strollers and those who cannot see well or easily lift their feet up onto the curb.

Install handrails, ramps, and automatic doors. Regularly check them to eliminate any hazards.

Use entrance mats with flat and secured edges that do not curl up, as those are tripping hazards. Absorbent floor mats help prevent falls by catching rain and snow at entrances and spilled drinks at food establishments.

Keep walkways and parking areas well lit. Use motion-activated lights indoors and outdoors when possible or use night lights inside.

Keep homes, yards and public areas free of clutter.

Wear shoes in good condition and that fit well. Worn soles and heels are a tripping hazard, as are shoes that fall off the feet because they do not fit well or have untied shoelaces. Individuals at risk of falls should wear shoes and slippers that fit all around their feet with no open backs.

Ensure proper fit of canes and walkers.

Do not let pets get underfoot. Teach them basic commands like 'sit' and 'stay.'

To improve coordination and balance, older Delawareans can enroll in A Matter of Balance© classes that are held in communities throughout the state. For a schedule of A Matter of Balance© classes, call Volunteer Delaware 50+ at 302-255-9882 in New Castle County and 302-515-3020 in Kent and Sussex counties.

ChristianaCare offers BingoCize, an evidence-based fall prevention program integrating Bingo and exercise, as well as the ThinkFirst to Prevent Falls© program, which can be done either virtually or in person. The ThinkFirst program addresses home modifications, medications, balance, healthy eating, and other strategies to prevent falls. To schedule these programs and obtain more information, send an email to injuryprevention@christianacare.org.

The DCIP's Falls Prevention Team and the Modern Maturity Center will hold a Falls Prevention Bingo and Resource Fair at the center on September 22 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The event is open to the public. The Modern Maturity Center is located at 1121 Forrest Ave. in Dover. Visit www.modern-maturity.org for more information.

To learn more about falls and falls prevention, refer to the CDC's Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries (STEADI) program at <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html> and the National Council on Aging at <https://www.ncoa.org/>.

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Anyone who is deaf, hard of hearing, Deaf-Blind, or speech-disabled can contact DPH by dialing 711 first using specialized devices (i.e. TTY, TeleBraille, voice devices). The 711 service is free and to learn more about how it works, please visit delawarerelay.com.

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.

